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SUBJECT: "RUSSIAN-GERMANS": IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION
PROBLEMS IN SOUTHWEST GERMANY

1. (SBU) Summary: The immigration and integration of ethnic Germans and their families from the former Soviet Union (Aussiedler) is a major social problem in Germany. Newcomers' lack of German language skills makes them unemployable and drug-related crimes and ghettoization are endemic among Aussiedler youth. Government efforts at promoting Aussiedler well-being and integration focus on programs intended to help them improve their German language skills. Although the number of Aussiedler has steadily diminished since the early 1990s, the Aussiedler already in Germany remain a festering social problem for which no comprehensive solution has been implemented by the federal or state governments. End summary.

Who are the "Aussiedler?"

2. (U) Aussiedler are descendents of Germans who were immigrated to Russia beginning in the 18th century when Czarina Catherine the Great, born into the German aristocracy, invited Germans to settle in Russia. There was continuous migration of Germans to Russian lands up until the beginning of the Soviet Union. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin had the Aussiedler deported to Soviet Central Asia. The 1949 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany re-codified the longstanding ethnic concept of German nationality; ethnic Germans were guaranteed the right to German residence and citizenship.

3. (SBU) Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union were in a position to take advantage of the citizenship law as well. Beginning in the 1990s, whole communities left the former Soviet Union to settle in Germany. In addition to those who could prove German ethnicity, family members including non-German spouses and children were allowed to immigrate as well. In response to the sudden surge in immigrants, the FRG set a cap of 220,000 Aussiedler immigrants per year in 1993, and in the same year enacted a new regulation requiring ethnic German principals to pass a German language competency test. Approximately 30 percent of applicants fail the test, which supplements genealogical data to establish the applicants' ethnic German bona fides. The annual number of Aussiedler moving to Germany has decreased steadily and the cap has never actually been met. In 2002, 91,000 Aussiedler immigrated to Germany. Germany had targeted aid to Aussiedler communities abroad to improve local conditions and stem the flow, for example to ethnic German families in Kazakhstan who were interested in resettlement in Siberia or the Volga region of Russia. Such resettlement in Russia has proved much less attractive to most of Central Asia's ethnic Germans than the possibility of starting a new life in Germany.

The Aussiedler in Southwest Germany

4. (SBU) Aussiedler were settled in Germany according to a fixed formula in order to avoid what government officials called in the mid-1990s "bunching." Hesse accepted 7.2 percent of all Aussiedler immigrants and Baden-Wuerttemberg (B-W) 12.4 percent. (In B-W, this meant 11,245 persons in 2002; 12,093 in 2001; and 11,749 in 2000.) Almost 95 percent comes from the former Soviet Union (statistics do not distinguish between Russia and the central Asian republics, but German government officials believe that former Russian and Kazakh nationals dominate this group.) Many Germans do not perceive Aussiedler as Germans and normally refer to them as "Russians" regardless of their actual ethnicity. Only 25 percent of the Aussiedler are actually ethnic Germans. The remaining 75 percent are spouses and family members, often with no German background or German language skills at all.

5. (SBU) Many Germans associate Aussiedler, particularly the youth, with drugs and crime. Media reporting, sometimes exaggerated, perpetuates this view. Aussiedler are frequently mentioned in connection with organized crime.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung reported three cases of human trafficking involving ethnic Germans from Russia in recent months. Papers in the Frankfurt area attribute the emergence of a new and stronger form of heroin to Aussiedler drug gangs. The Associated Press reported that in July 2002 four Aussiedler were caught attacking an Iranian woman and her son near Frankfurt. The article spoke of a "new breed of right-wing extremism" growing among the Aussiedler against other foreigners in Germany.

16. (SBU) The "drugs and crime" stereotype contains some truth: Aussiedler youth tend to be more involved in criminal activity. According to a 2002 police survey, every tenth German juvenile offender was of ethnic Russian origin. However, a spokesperson for the Frankfurt police cautioned us not to view Aussiedler as more criminal than Germans.

The Drug Problem -----

17. (SBU) Particularly worrying to local officials is an increase in drug abuse and drug-related crimes among young Aussiedler. Rheinland-Pfalz (R-P) statistics document that in urban areas with a high percentage of Aussiedler -- such as the industrial city of Ludwigshafen home to the multinational giant BASF -- every fourth person involved in drugs is an Aussiedler. The police in R-P and other states have also noticed an increase in violent crimes and a growing number of HIV and tuberculosis among incarcerated Aussiedler. One expert, Irene Troester, from Hohenheim University near Stuttgart, states that there is a misconception that young Aussiedler "imported" the drug problem to Germany. She is the author of a comprehensive study on Aussiedler and says that almost all these young immigrants become involved with drugs after they arrive in Germany. Troester, who immigrated from Kazakhstan at the age of seven, says that young Aussiedler are under great social and economic pressure. Already steeped in social customs of heavy drinking, they turn to alcohol at age 14 or 15 and are then easily lured to drugs.

Social Isolation -----

18. (SBU) Many Aussiedler perceive an unwelcoming attitude among native Germans, which probably contributes to the social isolation of the community. Most Aussiedler are settled in groups of over 100 in dedicated, often geographically isolated apartment complexes. Cities received subsidies for taking in Aussiedler in the 1990s and built large housing complexes as the most economic means of accommodation, and some were placed in renovated former military facilities. According to Troester, politicians often preferred to concentrate Aussiedler in one area in order to avoid social problems they feared would be associated with contact between native Germans and the immigrants. "Then only one neighborhood goes bad," said Troester.

19. (SBU) Some Germans look upon the government's support of Aussiedler with frustration and anger. Aussiedler receive more housing assistance than many Germans or other immigrants. Immigrants with large families, are entitled to bigger homes. This creates the perception that an Aussiedler family with poor German and few marketable skills receives preferential treatment while other Germans and non-German immigrants receive less. There is also a widespread perception that many Aussiedler have fraudulently claimed German ethnicity. The problems of crime and drug abuse have further increased calls for an end to the "coddling" of Aussiedler and their families.

Language As Key for Integration -----

10. (SBU) Government experts agree that acquiring language skills is considered key for successful integration into German society. According to Herbert Rech (CDU), the B-W commissioner for Aussiedler, young immigrants do not feel sufficiently compelled to learn German. The B-W Social Democratic (SPD) Caucus Chief Wolfgang Drexler welcomed Rech's comments saying, "The CDU is finally facing reality concerning the Aussiedler community." To improve the integration of Aussiedler, B-W is running a model project known as the "integration guide." Newly arrived Aussiedler sign a contract that lists their rights and obligations. A social worker then acts as an advisor for the immigrant and assists in the integration effort. B-W spends 4.4 million Euro annually for integrating Aussiedler and is thus a leader in southwest Germany.

11. (SBU) Hesse has no comprehensive Aussiedler policy, but spends 655,000 Euro to support so called "expellee organizations" (Vertriebenenverbände). (NOTE: The name dates back to the ethnic Germans who were expelled from Eastern Europe in the immediate postwar period and

subsequently formed support groups.) Many Aussiedler do not consider the associations helpful, however. "They only care for people, who fled after the war, not those coming today," Troester said.

COMMENT

12. (SBU) The Aussiedler problem points up weaknesses in German immigration policy. The Constitutional requirement and political pressures that led to Germany's acceptance of large numbers of Aussiedler in the early 1990s marked the first time in Germany's history that the government had to develop a management plan for large-scale immigration and integration. As efforts to reform Germany's immigration law continue, there is a tendency for experts as well as politicians to call on approaches used to deal with Aussiedler in handling other immigrants. However, the Aussiedler actually represent a very special type of immigrant, quite different from the skilled workers that German immigration experts increasingly point to as the future of German immigration and, indeed, of the German population. Unlike economic migrants under a Canadian immigration model, Aussiedler lack concrete reasons to learn German and adapt to German society; they are both coddled and isolated by the German government. Although the number of Aussiedler settling in Germany continues to decline, the large number already living in Southwest German remain a festering social problem. There are indications that this problem might be exacerbated by the Southwest's increasing role as a preferred residence for Aussiedler originally settled in Eastern states, whose native populations have reputations for being especially unwelcoming. End Comment.

13. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

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